

Free Is Not Always Effective

BY CRYSTAL M. BRIMER, OD



How do we ensure patients use the ocular products we think are best? For prescription products, the answer is simple; but in the over-the-counter (OTC) realm, it is much more complex. For decades, we have handed out free samples and coupons, but do they affect patients' decision making, or does definitive direction from the doctor have a greater impact on patient purchases?

Patients look to optometrists for expertise, knowledge, and direction, not a goody bag. Lens care makes a difference in the comfort and safety of a patient's wearing experience, and most of us have a preferred product. It is up to the eye care professional to invest the time to properly educate and direct patients' choices. Lens care is too essential to be diminished to a "trick or treat" equivalent.

ESTABLISHING A PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH PATIENTS

Whereas about 95% of optometrists in a recent survey said they handed out a sample lens care kit for every contact lens patient, only 31% of patients said they received an actual recommendation for a specific product.¹ This is an excellent reminder that distributing free sample kits does not always translate into a recommendation. In reality, free samples have not impacted patient compliance or patients' decisions about what to purchase.

Instead, patients want direction. In a recent survey, patients had to choose between receiving a free sample of solution or a recommendation for a specific product. The majority of patients surveyed chose the doctor's recommendation, saying they would forgo a free sample in exchange for doctor-driven direction.²

Optometrists should compare the ocular products on the market and determine which ones they would prefer patients to use—both prescription and OTC products. It is critical to effectively communicate a specific product recommendation and proper lens care protocol to the patient. Using a small tear off pad that details your suggestions for the lens' care, wear time, and disposal schedule could be useful for disseminating this information.

Sample solution kits are good for first-time wearers, who are receptive of taking direction in both what to use and how to properly care for their lenses. These individuals have nothing at home to use, and we want them to start them off on the right track with the right habits.

Patients who have been in contacts for years are typically older and likely experiencing decreased tear

KEY POINTS

- Patients look to their eye care provider for expertise, knowledge, and specific direction.
- Patients in a recent survey indicated they would forego a free sample in exchange for a specific recommendation from their eye care provider.²
- Giving patients clear advice about what products to use—and how to use them—may be the key to ensuring better compliance with lens protocols.

production and dryer eyes, meaning they have higher demands to keep their lenses wet and comfortable. Unfortunately, the established wearers are the least loyal to branded solutions,³ and their propensity to move toward store branded solutions may not provide the desired comfort they need.

Discomfort is the number-one reason patients discontinue lens wear and contact lens care influences comfort.⁴ In a recent global survey of over 10,000 patients, 58% of contact lens wearers reported end-of-day dryness after using their current care protocol, but only 19% continued to have issues after switching to OPTI-FREE PureMoist MPDS for 2 weeks.⁵ These data highlight the importance of spending time to educate patients on using the recommended solution in the correct manner.

CONCLUSION

The doctor's recommendation is the key to influencing patient behavior. If it is true that there is a difference in lens care products—and it is true—then our advice on what product to use should not change according to our supply of sample kits. It is our responsibility to research and decide which products are best for our patients, and it is our duty to relay that information to our patients in a manner that translates the importance of compliance. ■

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3. Alcon data on file, 2010.

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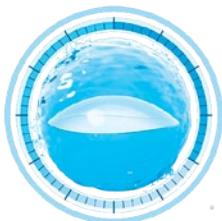
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